DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 844 FL 020 882

AUTHOR Masny, Diana; Foxall, Justine
TITLE Writing Apprehension in L2.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Adult Education; *Adult Students; Arabic; Comparative Analysis; Educational Attitudes; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; French; *French Canadians; Intensive Language Courses; Japanese; Polish; Postsecondary Education; Questionnaires; Second Language Learning; Spanish Speaking; Two Year Colleges; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Writing Apprehension; *Writing Attitudes; *Writing Difficulties; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Canada; French Speaking

ABSTRACT

A study investigated links between writing apprehension, preferred writing processes, and academic achievement in 28 adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). One group was of varying language background in an intensive intermediate ESL class and the other consisted of francophone Canadians in an evening intermediate ESL writing class at a junior college. Students were tested and categorized as high and low achievers in their writing classes. Based on scores on a writing apprehension questionnaire, the students were also classified as having high or low writing apprehension. Results indicate that high achievers had lower apprehension scores, as anticipated. It was also found that: (1) high and low achievers were more concerned about form than content; (2) low achievers were more concerned about form than were high achievers; (3) high and low apprehensive writers were more concerned about form than content; and (4) low apprehensive students were more concerned about form than were high apprehensive students. High apprehension also correlated with unwillingness to take more writing classes. However, students with high concern about form appeared to see the need to write. Females were more apprehensive than males. An 18-item bibliography, the writing apprehension questionnaire, and criteria for writing skills classification are appended. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED352844

WRITING APPREHENSION IN L2

Diana Masny, University of Ottawa

and

Justine Foxall, Carleton University

Address for correspondance: Faculty of Education,
University of Ottawa
145 J.J.Lussier
Ottawa K1N 6N5
e-mail: WTCTA@UOTTAWA

FL 020 882

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Diana Masny

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The term "writing apprehension" (WA), sometimes known as the 'writer's block' (Rose, 1980, 1984), refers to a person's predisposition to undertake or to avoid writing tasks, and was first used by Daly and Miller (1975a). They developed an instrument to measure students' apprehension when writing in their first language, English: the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (D-M WAT). First language (L1) writing research reported, among other things, that students with high writing apprehension levels exhibit less willingness to take an advanced course in writing, and tend to choose those occupations and college majors that are perceived as low in writing demand (Daly and Miller, 1975 b; Daly and Shamo 1978; Selfe, 1984).

In second language research, Gungle and Taylor (1989) were also concerned with writing apprehension and its relation to students' willingness to take writing courses and to the choice of occupation or college programme requiring writing. Moreover, they were interested in studying the relationship between WA and students' concern for form since the latter was hypothesized to contribute to writer's block. In their first study Gungle and Taylor (1989) suggested a positive correlation between ESL WA and attention to form (how one writes); i.e, the higher the WA score, the greater the attention to form. On the other hand they expected a negative correlation to characterize ESL WA and attention to content (what one writes); i.e. those students with low WA would also be more concerned with the content of their writing than the form. Finally, Gungle and Taylor posited a negative correlation between ESL WA and the perceived writing requirements of ESL

students' majors, and a negative correlation between ESL WA and ESL students' interest in pursuing advanced writing classes.

The last two hypotheses were confirmed. However, no significant correlation was found between students' WA and attention to form, nor was there any significant negative correlation between students' ESL WA test scores and attention to content. Gungle and Taylor's second study (1989) did not result in any more conclusive findings: WA does not show a significant positive correlation with a concern for grammar and form, even though it shows a negative correlation with concern for content and ideas.

Gungle and Taylor suggested that their modified form of the D-M WAT may not be capable of accurately testing ESL students' levels of WA. Nonetheless, they continue to assert that "WA is a real problem among ESL writers" (1989:246). We decided to explore the issue of writing apprehension among ESL students by studying two adult groups in the Ottawa region. We made further modifications to Gungle and Taylor's ESL WAT (Writing Apprehension Test) and, for the sake of distinguishing it, have called it the Writing Apprehension Questionnaire (WAQ: cf appendix 1).

We were interested in pursuing a number of research questions:

(1) Are ESL students who are high achievers in an English writing class less apprehensive than those who are low achievers? Our hypothesis is that ESL students who attain higher grades overall in ESL writing will have lower WA scores than low achieving ESL writing students.

(2) Are low achieving ESL writers concerned about content and/or form? The hypothesis is that low achieving students will indicate a higher apprehension on form.

(3) Are more apprehensive writers concerned about content and/or form? We would hypothesize that they will demonstrate greater apprehension regarding form.

(4) What is the relationship between writing apprehension and (a) the willingness to take advanced writing classes, and (b) the frequent need to write? The hypothesis is that students who score low on the WAQ are more willing to take advanced writing courses and see a frequent need to write.

Method

Subjects

Two groups of adult subjects (n=28) ranging from 20 to 55 years-old were chosen. Both had the same writing teacher. The first group was composed of fourteen students (eight different nationalities represented: Arabic, French, Japanese, Polish, Spanish...) in an intensive ESL intermediate class (76 hours) at the Second Language Institute, Ottawa. The second group was composed of fourteen Francophone Canadian students taking the evening ESL intermediate writing class (45 hours) offered at a junior college in Hull, a predominantly French-speaking city. In all, there were 17 female and 11 male subjects. Neither course was mandatory. At the end of the course, the instructor graded all of the students according to the band level grid of written expression

used at the Second Language Institute (cf. appendix 2). Based on the grid, students were then categorized into high and low achievers. Students receiving a rating of 4 or 5 were grouped together as low achieving writers (n=14) while those students receiving a rating of 6 or 7 were grouped together as high achieving writers (n=14).

Instrument

A few modifications were made to Gungle and Taylor's WAT: 15 items were devised instead of 26 (appendix 1). The four questions developed by Gungle and Taylor were also used with one exception: their question on "major writing requirement" was replaced by our "need to write" item (cf.items 16 to 19, appendix 1).

Once the students had completed the WAQ, their answers were recodified. Each response was given a value of 0 through 3, so that a 3 indicates the highest level of WA per item. The highest possible maximum WA score is 45. A reliability coefficient was established at $\alpha = .85$.

Procedure

A total of 28 students were tested and 28 complete sets of data were received. An examination of the distribution of the values was found to be normal. Both groups were administered the WAQ in the last two weeks of their course. It took them approximately fifteen minutes to complete. All the students appeared to understand the statements quite well and only minor clarifications were called for.

Results

A descriptive analysis of the results showed a mean of 19/45, (S.D.=7). Then, an analysis of group-mean comparison (Mann-Whitney U) was performed to determine statistical differences between the two test sites. While the Francophone group received a higher score on writing apprehension (21.1) than the International group (17), this difference was not significant ($p<.15$). Accordingly both groups were collapsed into one for analysis. Next, we analysed writing apprehension from the gender perspective. The results (Mann-Whitney U) demonstrated that the global apprehension score was significantly higher for the female subjects (21) than the male subjects (15.5) ($p<.05$).

Are high achieving writers less apprehensive? Based on an analysis of group comparison (Mann-Whitney U), our results showed significantly lower scores on the WAQ for students considered to be high achievers in writing (15.3) than the low achieving writers (22.9), $Z=2.65$, $p<.008$.

Are low achieving writers concerned about form and/or content? In our analysis (Wilcoxon), both groups of writers were more concerned about form than about content (Table 1). For the high achieving writers, this difference was significant: 1.79 vs. 1.14, $Z=2.03$, $p<.04$. For the low achieving writers, the results are similar: 2.43 vs. 1.36, $Z=2.80$, $p<.005$. Moreover, the low achieving writers were significantly more concerned about form than the high achieving writers: 2.43 vs. 1.79, $Z=2.2$, $p<.03$.

Table 1. Mean rating for concern about:

	Content	Form
high level writers	1.14	1.79
low level writers	1.36	2.43

Are high apprehensive writers concerned about content and/or form? We first divided the subjects into two groups of low and high apprehensive subjects using the median obtained on the WAQ. Accordingly, all subjects scoring below 19 were considered to be low apprehensive (n=14) while those scoring above 19 were high apprehensive (n=14). The mean score for the low apprehensive group was 13.6 while the high apprehensive was 24.7. These differences were significant: $Z=4.43$, $p<.001$. Following that, a comparaison of mean ratings (Wilcoxon) obtained for form and content within each group demonstrated that both low and high apprehensive groups are more concerned about form than about content (Table 2). For the low apprehensive group, the mean difference between form and content is significant: 2.14 vs. 1.21, $Z=2.53$, $p<.01$; for the high apprehensive, the results are similar: 2.00 vs. 1.39, $Z=2.2$, $p<.03$. No significant mean differences (Mann Whitney), however, were found between both groups for content (1.21 vs. 1.39), and for form (2.14 vs. 2.00).

Table 2. Mean rating for concern about

	Content	Form
Low apprehensive group	1.21	2.14
High apprehensive group	1.39	2.00

What is the relationship between writing apprehension and (a) the willingness to take advanced writing classes, and (b) the frequent need to write? Based on an analysis of correlation (Spearman) (Table 3), a significant relationship was found between writing subjects' apprehension and their unwillingness to take advanced writing courses (r=.39). We also found that subjects' concern for form was significantly related to their concern for content (r=.34). Finally, subjects' concern for form was significantly correlated with the need to write (r=.34). This indicates that in spite of subjects' concern for form, they nevertheless see the need to write often.

Table 3. Correlation coefficient (Spearman).

	Focus on Content	Focus on Form	Unwilling to Take a course	Need to write
WAQ	.18	.13	.39*	-.07
Content		.34*	.08	.11
Form			.16	.34*
Taking course				.05

* p<.05

Discussion

The discussion is constrained to the results of the study and centers on the following: gender and apprehension, writing achievement and apprehension, writing achievement and concern for content/form, and writing apprehension and its relation to content/form. Finally, we will discuss the findings relating apprehension, the desire to take advanced writing courses, and the need to write.

Writing apprehension and gender Our results indicated that female subjects were more apprehensive than males. These results lend support to previous research (Fayer, 1986) which found that female students were more apprehensive than males in ESL writing. However, in another study involving students' writing in English their native language, Daly and Miller (1978) found that male subjects were more apprehensive than females. The authors attributed this difference to the notion that "females receive more positive teacher reactions to their writing than do males" (1978:47). This conclusion appears to contradict more recent studies (Harvard Education Letter, 1989; Sadker & Sadker, 1986) indicating a significant tendancy overall in teachers' handing out more frequent praise and encouragement to males than females. Moreover, in taking an ESL writing class (as an option possibly), it may be that more females register for these courses than males and the males who do come to ESL courses are perhaps less apprehensive to begin with.

Writing achievement and apprehension Our findings confirmed the hypothesis that high achieving writers were less apprehensive. Such findings are supported by first language research (Faigley,Daly & Witte,1981; Selfe, 1984) suggesting that high apprehensive subjects have a weaker knowledge of writing skills, vocabulary and limited syntactic resources. Second language research in this area is not extensive. Betancourt and Phinney (1987), examined writing apprehension in college students taking an ESL writing course. They found that writing apprehension varied according to language proficiency and previous exposure and experience with writing.

Writing achievement and concern for content-form Our results indicated that both high and low achieving writers were significantly more concerned about form than content, with low achieving writers being significantly more concerned with form than the high achievers (cf.Table 1). The latter partially supports the hypothesis in our study (low achieving ESL writers are more concerned about form); furthermore, it adds evidence to other research demonstrating that advanced writers are less apprehensive about form (Gungle & Taylor, 1989). Incidentally and similar to Gungle & Taylor, a significant and positive relationship was found between concern for content and concern for form (cf. Table 3). Those subjects concerned about form are also concerned about content.

Writing apprehension and its relation to content-form Our hypothesis proposing that subjects low on apprehension are more concerned with content while those high on apprehension are more concerned about form was rejected (both groups are more concerned about form). Partial support for this hypothesis can be found in some studies (Taylor et al., 1987; Zamel, 1983) involving interviews with students. Although they felt that content was important, these comments were not supported in the results when the subjects were administered the writing apprehension test (Taylor et al., 1987). They were still very concerned about form. Our analysis in Table 2 demonstrated that both high and low apprehensive students were significantly more concerned with form than with content.

The concern for writers' block is matched by the desire to see a reduction of students' apprehension through modified teaching practices. While the more traditional approach to writing instruction has placed considerable emphasis on grammar, it is precisely this approach which Zamel (1982) claims leads to writer's block. If apprehension is to be reduced, then recent developments in "process writing" classrooms which put a greater emphasis on content should be a viable solution. It would appear, therefore, that teaching strategies in the classroom are influential variables in apprehension. In this study, the ESL instructor provided information concerning strategies used in the writing classes. The approach was conventional: while process-writing with conferencing was not used, the instructor provided feedback on both content and

form. Nevertheless the instructor paid much attention to grammar and correctness because it was always part of the evaluation of the students' work even though they might go through two or three drafts.

Writing apprehension and willingness to take more writing classes Similar to previous studies (Daly and Miller, 1978; Taylor et al., 1987), our results produced a significant correlation between subjects' high apprehension scores and their unwillingness to take writing classes. Since the subjects were concerned with form, it was perhaps not surprising to see their reluctance about taking writing courses. Finally, we found, contrary to Gungle and Taylor (1989), a significant correlation between the need to write and focus on form. This means that despite subjects' great concern for form, they often saw the need to write. These results can be explained in the light of the subjects' perceived demand for writing. Many of the subjects in our study were clerical workers in the federal government which espouses a bilingual policy in its agencies. Subjects needed to improve their English writing for current job-related assignments or to improve their chances of receiving a promotion in their work place.

Conclusion

To summarize the above findings: (1) female subjects were more apprehensive; (2) high achieving writers were less apprehensive; and (3) subjects overall were more concerned with form than with content, high achieving writers were, however, less concerned about form than low level writers. Finally, a correlational analysis found that (a) apprehension was linked to subjects' unwillingness to take another advanced writing course and (b) despite subjects' concern for form, they often saw the need to write.

In light of the results of this study, measuring writers' apprehension is context-sensitive. This means that individuals' apprehension about writing in a second language may differ from that of writing in a first language. This is due in part to reasons such as language proficiency, previous exposure to writing, the motives for taking writing courses, the type of second language learner (international student, landed immigrant, bilingual learner), instructional practices and course content. Moreover, apprehension might increase when the learner's experiential knowledge is not integrated with course content.

Regarding the issue of writing instruction, it has yet to demonstrate its effectiveness: content-based process-writing classroom strategies may reduce apprehension since the writing environment is conducive to exploring ideas and content. At this point, the overridding concern for form is still linked to low level writers and they are high apprehensive. More research is needed investigating apprehension and instructional strategies: we

need to know whether a "process-writing" class by reducing its emphasis on form will significantly reduce apprehension. We could then hypothesize that low apprehensive subjects while being concerned more about content should not be apprehensive about content. Apprehension about form should not be replaced by apprehension about content. The latter might also contribute to writers' block.

Finally, despite the finding in our study that writing apprehension and writing achievement are related, second language learners continue to see the need to write often. These results are linked to the context in which writing is perceived: long-term and short-term goals. The Francophone subjects aim for both. Writing in English, their second language, means that they are in an environment where working knowledge of both official languages is an opportunity for upward economic mobility. The international students are preparing to take the TOEFL or to learn English as they apply for landed immigrant status. Their aims might be considered more long-term.

In conclusion, writing apprehension examined by means of a questionnaire is a valid approach. Gungle and Taylor maintain that a more accurate measure of writing apprehension should be developed. Future research should incorporate varied research methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) to take into account those context-sensitive variables in order to better understand the nature of writng apprehension, an important factor that contributes to the writer's block for the ESL learner.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Betancourt, F. and M. Phinney. (1987). Sources of writing block in bilingual writers. ED281361.

Daly, J.A. (1978). Writing apprehension and writing competency. Journal of Educational Research, 72, 10-14.

Daly, J.A. and M.D. Miller. (1975a). The empirical development of an instrument to measure writing apprehension. Research in the Teaching of English, 9, 242-249.

Daly,J.A. and M.D.Miller. (1975b). Further studies on writing apprehension: SAT scores, success expectations, willingness to take advanced courses and sex differences. Research in the Teaching of English, 9, 250-256.

Daly, J.A. and W. Shamo. (1978). Academic decisions as a function of writing apprehension. Research in the Teaching of English. 12, 119-126.

Faigley, L., J.A. Daly, and S.P. Witte. (1981). The role of writing apprehension in writing performance and competence. Journal of Educational Research. 75, 16-20.

Fox, R.F. (1980). Treatment of writing apprehension and its effects on compostiion. Research in the Teaching of English, 14, 39-49.

Frayer,J.M. (1986). Writing apprehension among Puerto Rican University Students. Paper presented at the 72nd Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association. Chicago, November.

Gungle, B.W. and V. Taylor. (1989). Writing apprehension and second language writers. In D. Johnson and D. Roen (Eds.). Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students. New York: Longman.

Harvard Education Letter. (1989). Girls: Drawbacks of Early Success,5-6: 8.

Rose, M. (1980). Rigid rules, inflexible plans, and the stifling of language: A cognitivist analysis of writer's block. College Coposition and Communication, 31, 389-401.

Rose, M. (1984). Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rose, M. (1988). Narrowing the mind and page: remedial writers and cognitive reductionism. College Composition and Communication, 39, 267-302.

Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. (1986). Sexism in the classroom: from grade school to graduate school. Phi Delta Kappa, 512-515.

Selfe, C.L. (1984). The predrafting processes of four high- and four low-apprehensive writers. Research in the Teaching of English, 18, 45-64.

Taylor,V., Johnson, D., & Gungle,B.W. (1987). Affective factors in L2. [manuscript].

Zamel, V. (1983). The composing process of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. TESOL Quarterly, 17, 165-187.

Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. TESOL Quarterly, 16, 195-209.

Appendix 1

DIRECTIONS: Below is a series of statements about writing in English. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you **(1)** strongly agree, **(2)** agree, **(3)** disagree, **(4)** strongly disagree with the statement. Some of these statements may seem repetitious; just take your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

		strongly agree ----> **strongly disagree**
1.	I avoid writing in English.	1 2 3 4
2.	I look forward to writing down my ideas in English.	1 2 3 4
3.	I am afraid of writing essays in English when I know they will be evaluated.	1 2 3 4
4.	Taking an English composition class is a very frightening experience.	1 2 3 4
5.	Handing in a composition to my English teacher makes me feel good.	1 2 3 4
6.	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition in English.	1 2 3 4
7.	I feel confident that I can express my ideas clearly when writing in English.	1 2 3 4
8.	I like to have my friends read what I have written in English.	1 2 3 4
9.	I'm nervous about writing in English.	1 2 3 4
10.	I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas in English.	1 2 3 4
11.	Writing in English is a lot of fun.	1 2 3 4
12.	I expect to do poorly in English composition classes even before I start them.	1 2 3 4
13.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper in English.	1 2 3 4
14.	It's easy for me to write good compositions in English.	1 2 3 4
15.	I'm not good at writing in English.	1 2 3 4

		strongly agree	---->		strongly disagree
16.	When writing in English the things I worry about **most** are my ideas and the content.	1	2	3	4
17.	I would like to take an advanced writing class in English.	1	2	3	4
18.	When writing in English the things I worry about **most** are grammar and correctness.	1	2	3	4

19. After this English course I will (choose one)
very often **often** **sometimes** **seldom** **never**
need to write in English.

Appendix 2

The band level descriptions for the levels pertaining to the two groups studied are as follows:

7 Advanced : Appropriate use of language for the task. Sophisticated range of vocabulary and structures. Fluent expression, ideas clearly stated and supported. The thesis thoroughly developed.

6 High intermediate : Many problems in use of complex structures. Few grammar and punctuation errors. Effective word an idiom choice and use. Organization of text is clear, logical and cohesive. The thesis is well supported.

5 Intermediate : Some problems with complex sentences. Generally accurate and appropriate language mechanics and style. Loosely organized but main ideas stand out. Systematic development of topic including well structured main and subordinate themes and relevant supporting statements.

4 Low intermediate : Quite a few errors in language use, mechanics and vocabulary, but meaning is not confused or obscured. Organization is logical but sequencing is incomplete, redundant, and not cohesive. The content is relevant to topic but lacking in detail and supporting ideas.